

Prison: a place conducive to change.

Design Research Project APG 5058S
Submitted in Partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree Master of
Architecture (Professional)

by

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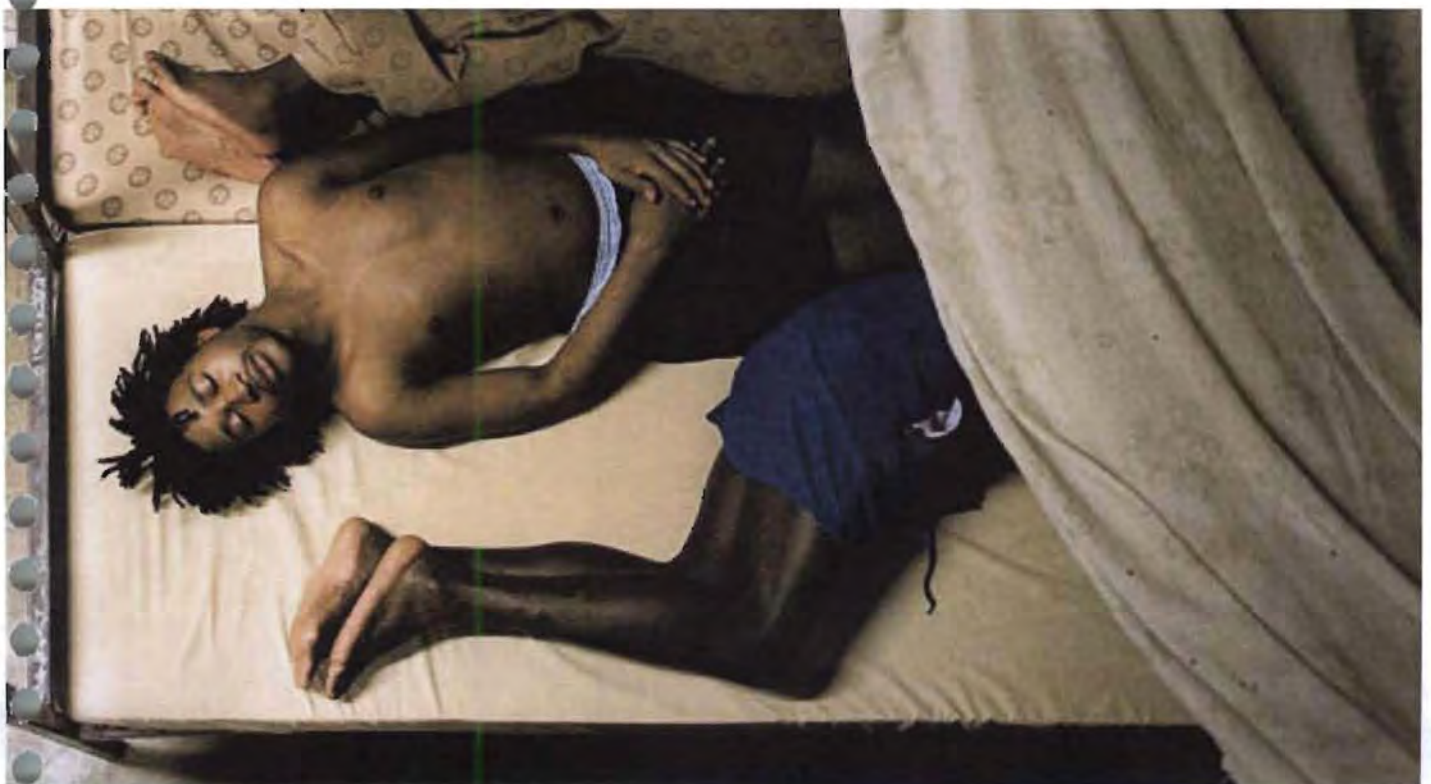
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"It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside
its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest
citizens, but its lowest ones."

— Nelson Mandela



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My Issue, My Thesis:

Architecture to me is the physical manifestation of the society that created it; it embodies and makes concrete the powers that shaped it, and remains long after the power shifts or falls. The Parthenon in Athens shows us how architecture was used to honour the gods in Ancient Greece - the gods playing a central part in Greek society, the houses of parliament in London remind us of a time where architecture was used to instil and encourage civil pride. Civic buildings in South Africa

are reminders of the authoritarian government that once controlled it. Architecture tells us something about society.

Given that I am trying to give some social commentary through my thesis based on the design of a public building, there are many building types I could choose to do a thesis on; house of parliament, a constitutional court, a place of education or a place that celebrates the arts. All buildings which we celebrate and express what we think we are as a society. My choice of thesis building type is however



inspired by the quote by Nelson Mandela. I believe that the true character of society shines through in how it treats the people who are cast aside and in general "other" than the rest of us. People we do not understand. I choose to do my thesis on places of incarceration. Through this thesis I would like to critique the society I am a part of. I will try to understand its shortcomings and I will in the end try to design the physical manifestation of what I wish society to be in the future, when we are ready, when all other issues have been resolved. My thesis is focused on the design of a medium/low security detention centre for juvenile males. As I

am trying to create an environment conducive to change it would only make sense to focus on prisoners that would likely be released back into society. Juveniles serve their sentences during the time that they are meant to be in school, thus a prison facility focussed on educating and the skills development of youths seems most feasible, though the programme I am proposing could be applied to medium to high security facilities as well.

This thesis seeks not to change society by changing one building type, but rather to envision a physical representation of what I wish for society based on the existing social and man-made



environment that influence the place
I live in. The place I call home.
For I have been taught that an
Architect is to always give more
than what is required, to plan
ahead and look forward, to design
for generations to come. What more
could one ever give a generation
that hope?



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A place to call "home".

To me the most significant place in finding an existential foothold is "home" i.e. the place that we relate too from childhood or early development. Place is made by human interaction in space and thus the character of a place depends on the social activity within that place. The social activity also influences identity. When a group of individuals feel the same way about place they form a culture. Culture in my mind refers to a group of people who share similar experiences about place and as such have similar aspirations with regards to place. These aspirations would be manifested

in a coherent architecture which represents their interpretation and aspirations for a specific place. Culture is one more aspect that influences an existential foothold; the belonging or relating to others. Different cultures mix by means of the interconnections between places. When different groups of people interact with each other the result is not always harmonious. Cultures assert a sense of power to themselves based on a range of preconceived criteria. The result often ends in social disasters such as ethnic cleansing and outbreaks of exclusive nationalisms. Cultures who assert power over others do not always erase "the other" by means of

8. Segregation in the United States. African American people were forced to sit at the back of the bus.



killing them; instead they attempt at imposing their culture on to 'the others'. Colonialism for example, saw one culture invading countries (places) to impose their social, economic and sovereignty on the people who lived there. One could argue that they tried to impose a sense of belonging-to onto the indigenous people.

In South Africa the National Party sought not to influence culture, but rather to separate them. The Nationalist government allocated people a place based on the colour of their skin. They moved people from the physical home thus leaving only memories. This large scale reorganisation of the country left

many groups of people homeless or rootless. The Nationalist government provided houses and "homelands" for the non-white people of South Africa. For the generation of people who experienced this, the effect was that of being un-rooted, but for the generations who were born and grew up in the homelands the affects would be alienating. As mentioned before, a child establishes a relationship with his immediate environment and thus establishes a sense of being-in-the-world. For the non-white generations born during Apartheid this would end up being an alienating process. After the relationship with home had already been established, as a teenager a non-white person



9. Hanover Street in District Six, before the area was bulldozed and the street renamed Keizergracht.

would come to know that your home signifies another man's power over you. Generations have come to hate the places they have been forced to recognise as home, with no concrete alternative place to identify as home. The idea or sense of home for many people in South Africa is rooted only in memory.

A place for "the others".

Forced removals are not the only caused of being in a state of homelessness. The structural and ideological changes brought about by the industrial revolution, led to changes in the way we as society make a living or in the way we dwell. Urbanisation is causing many people to relocate to the city in the hope

of finding a 'better life'. Thus the emergence of informal settlements as a form of temporary housing until a 'better life' can be made. Governments and urban planners are confronted with the problem of providing adequate housing for the masses of people who come to the city every year. There is really no time to evaluate every individual's family background and culture in order to provide a home to live in. The result is that people get allocated a default house, no matter the social or cultural background. The result is that social problems tend to be associated with these places of social housing. Poor housing conditions are perceived by

society as a breeding ground for all kinds of activities that threaten the fabric of our society. Scott Greer asks the question "why should housing be seen as a social problem at all?" He goes to answer the question in the following way: "The belief that housing and neighbourhoods were 'social problems' is largely based on the notion that problems arising in areas filled with people are in some way contagious. This contagion is largely confined to such 'diseases' as criminality, poverty, illiteracy, and physical breakdowns. Some people, however, are concerned with the slums because of their suspicion that those living inside the slums are likely to

have anarchistic effects upon the society as a whole... In the same vein, urban redevelopers in the new nations have said that housing is their country's number one problem. Asked why they think this, they say, 'We believe that the people who are have-nots, who are concentrated in these areas, are going to create massive civil disobedience in this society'. In old and new nations alike, the old fear of the have-nots crowded into certain areas of the city is still powerful. The 'haves' see the slums as the bailiwicks of disease, organised crime, and revolution. This believe has been largely due to rapid urbanisation, and the development of 'non-



10. RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses in Blue Downs.

11. (opposite) Blikkiesdorp

citizens' within the urban society as a whole. One origin of the notion that housing is a special problem is the assumption that we create outsiders by housing them together in separated parts of the city. Culturally different and differently rewarded, the successful do not find it comfortable to deal with such people. Therefore the interest in abolishing the slums; it is though that improved housing increases the outsider's stake in society, in law and order. The outsider is tied to a house as to as 'social anchor'. (Others, of course, prefer to build walls around the slums.)"

Greer is referring to the social housing in Britain and the generalisations made by citizens in the 1960s. The same can still be said about presumptions made by South African's today. Instead of recognising that society is the social engineers responsible for the social issues associated with areas where we house the 'others', we tend to step back and say 'punish them'.

Prisons are buildings used to keep and punish people who act against society's norms. Prisons are physical representations of the power of governments to enforce their power onto society. America has prisons for suspected terrorists;

the Apartheid government party had anyone opposing apartheid thrown in prison. Prisons as a building type developed over time. It was always used to house offenders, yet from time to time it would become places characterised by torture and injustice. The architecture of a building cannot influence what the government chooses to action inside the walls. You might argue that we are not currently using our prisons to torture or house people who oppose us politically, though government could start to do that at any point and there would be nothing that the design of a building could do to change that. Do we then design boxes to house and warehouse criminals for



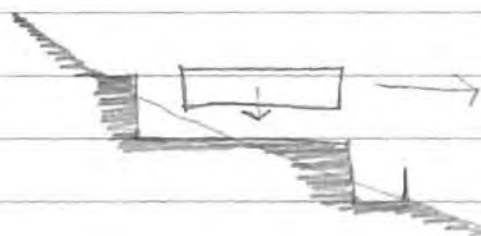
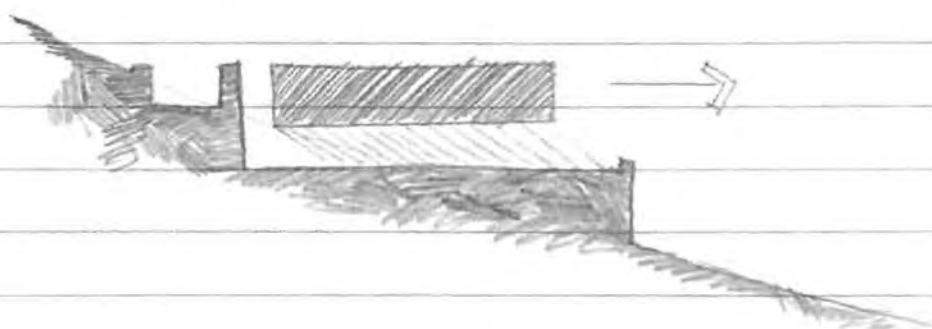
a set amount of time?

In South Africa where the education system is failing it's learners by dropping the minimum requirement to pass, where unemployment and poverty is an everyday reality to millions of South Africans, crime is synonymous with this country. Many people revert to crime to put bread on the table, it does not make it right, but when desperate people are caught and put in jail for trying to survive because the dream of a free and fair South Africa is failing them, is (overcrowded, mismanaged) prisons really any justice?

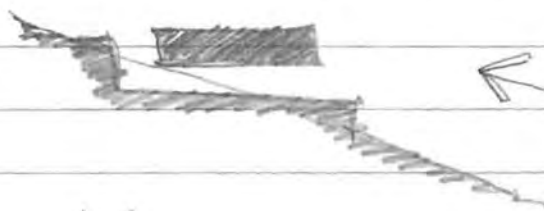
During my research into Prisons in South Africa, I came across the 2004 photographic thesis project of Mikhael Subotzky titled "Die Vier Hoeke" (The Four Corners) focussing on Pollsmoor. I found the images unsettling, to say the least, not only to see what an overcrowded cell actually looks like, but the idea that those are the spaces in which criminals are expected to be rehabilitated, change and better themselves. Sometimes you look at the conditions animals in zoo's are kept, and then you wonder why they attack their captors at the first chance they get. Not to say that criminals are animals, but having them locked up like wild beasts,

I'm sure will have the same effect once they are released back into society, to get back at the people who put them there - us.

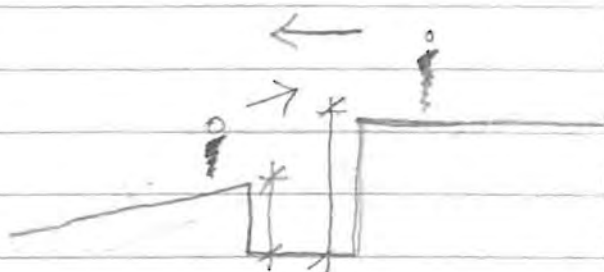
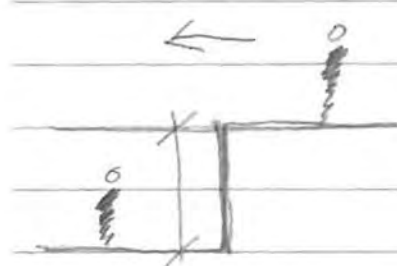
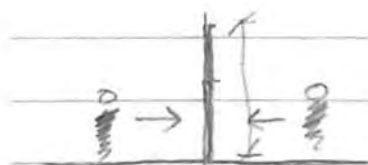
The images reminded me of the classical paintings depicting "Hell" with intertwined bodies and unimaginable pain being inflicted on the residents thereof. From there my concept: a building that would be grounded\digging in the earth, earth traditionally being the place of the underworld, but that would allow light in as to give the occupant a goal to aspire to. As for tectonics, this would create the opportunity for the building expression as going from solid and heavy to light and more transparent.



VIEWS.



SYMBOL





VIEWS.

WALL

WALL

VISUAL
IMPACT

Sketchbook :

Drawings exploring the slope and the various possibilities it provides in the design of a place of incarceration, not only does it create views and better surveillance, but also help in the building stand out as a object or symbol to deter crime.



SPACE

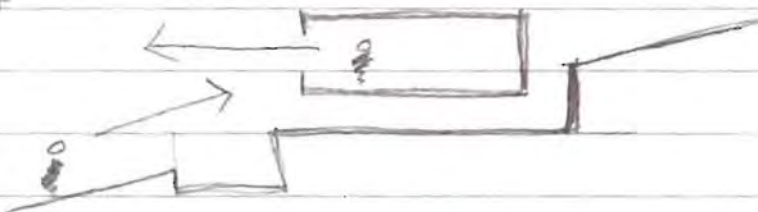
WALL



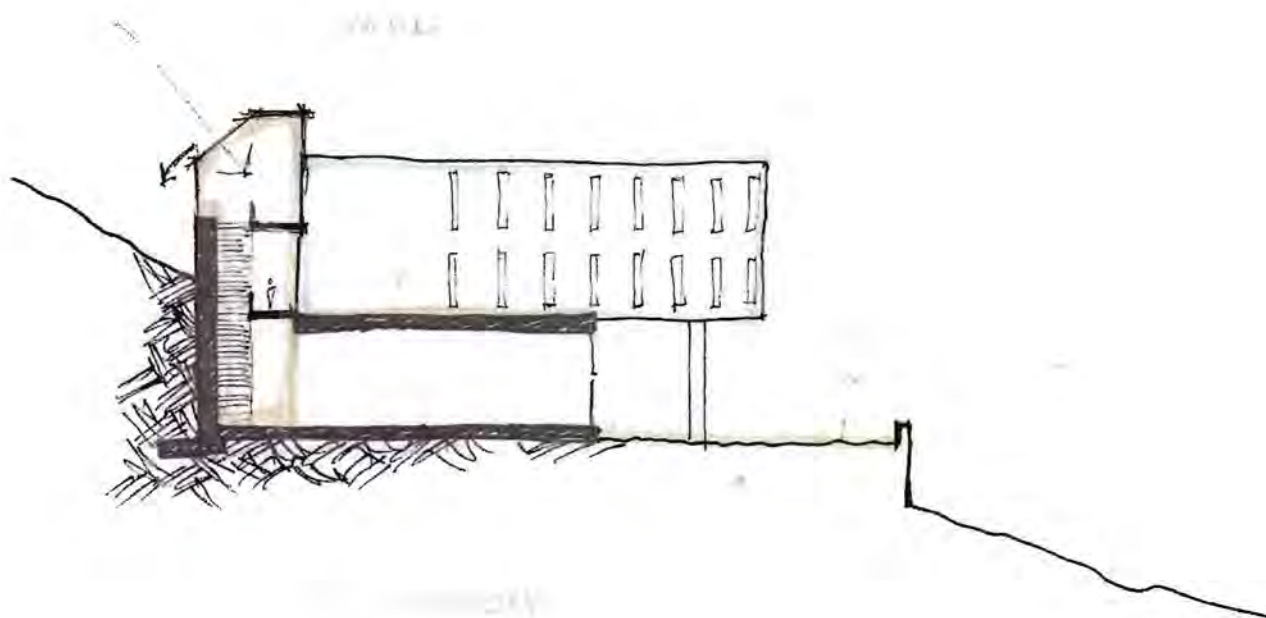
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HA HA

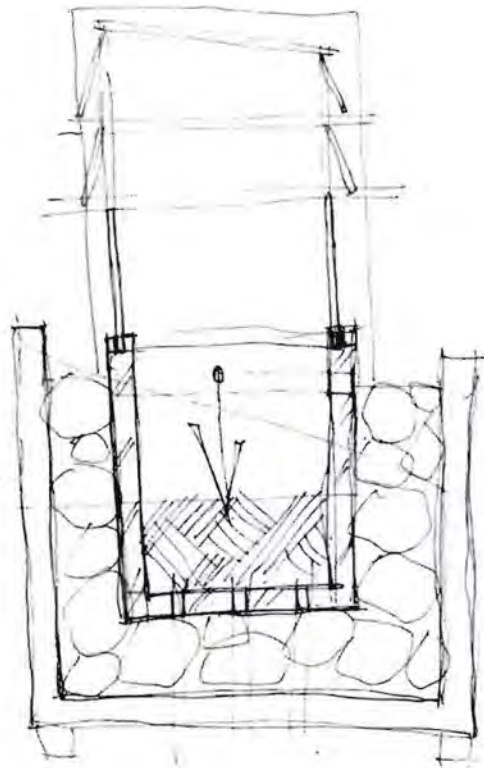
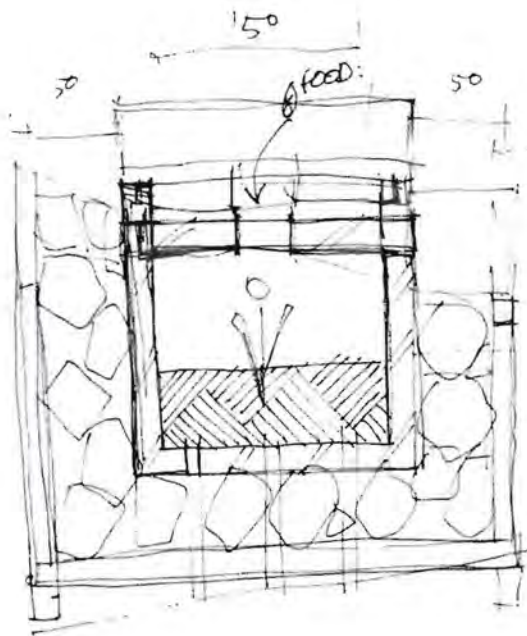


The location of the building would then play an important role in the design. I wanted the building to be on a sloped site; one to follow the concept of the building being grounded in the earth and then gradually becoming lighter as it moved away from the ground, and two because a sloped sight would give a prison the advantage of being moulded on a slope to make surveillance the main objective thus satisfying a functional requirement. Also a prison on a hill/slope emphasises the visual link between society and the symbol of government's power to punish.



The concept model was constructed and designed around the assumption that plants left in the dark would not grow as well as plants that are exposed to an abundance of light. The pepper plant represents a prisoner, and the model meant to show that given the right environment a living organism would flourish and grow...





PLYWOOD
STONE
CONCRETE *
SOIL -
PERSPEX.

To create a place of incarceration, a place that while punishing the user by confining him to a limited area of daily movement would also allow him space to grow and develop skills that he could utilise when returning to everyday life.

While the purpose of the building boundaries is to restrict movement, the bounding structures are not to limit the user's experience of the natural environment around him. Programmatically the building seeks to not only accommodate and house inmates, but to set up a structure of daily activity that would mimic/mirror that of everyday life in society. The building would be a training ground for adapting into

society rather than merely housing criminal youths and keeping them from harming society.

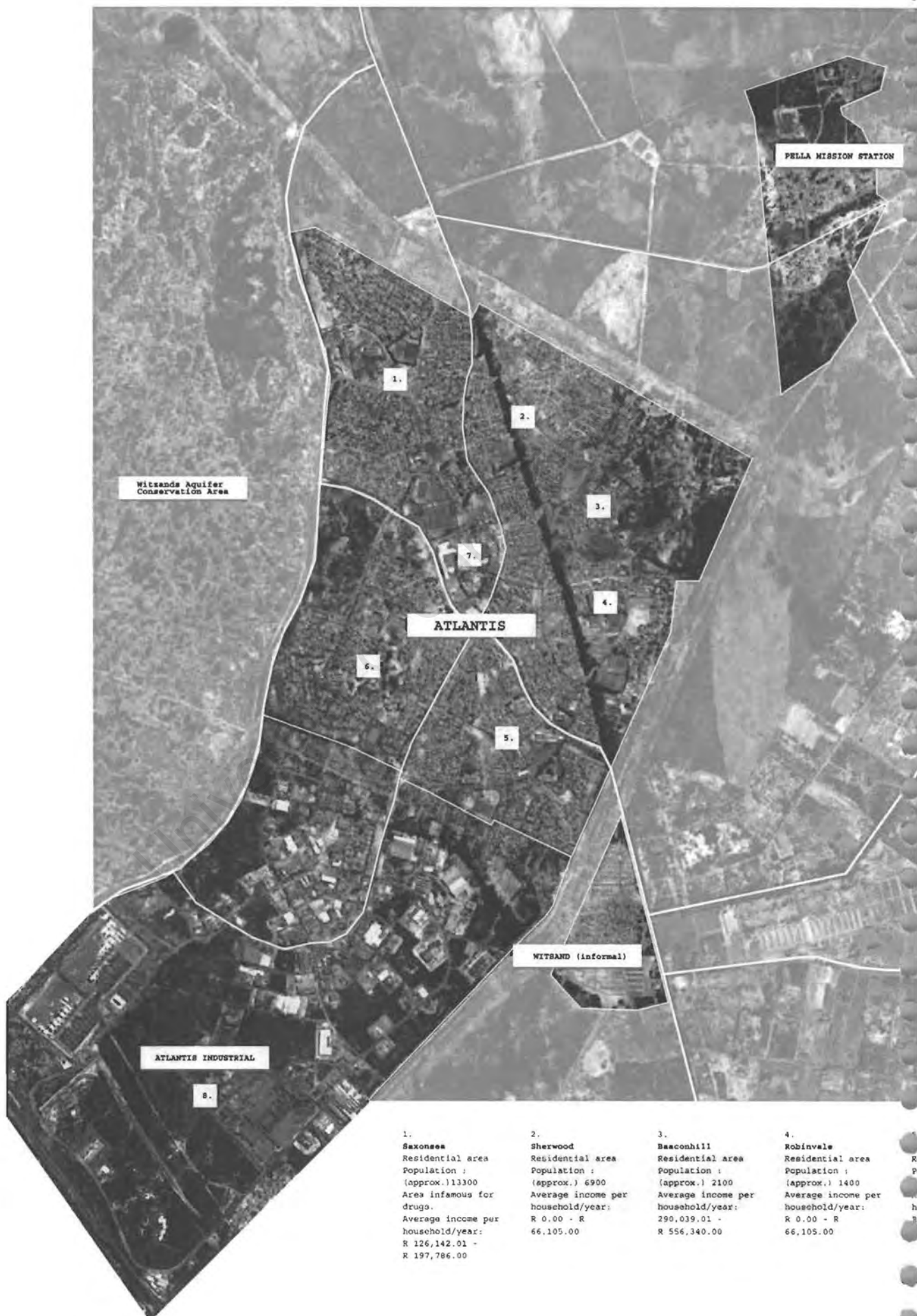
The design would also try to make the staff experience more pleasant thus improving the treatment of prisoners.

As the sloped sight plays an important role in the design of the building, it does on the one hand make it more visible thus highlighting its role as symbol to deter people from committing crime. Though this is inevitable, the intention of this design is to make the building more accessible to the public, more transparent, though still respecting the privacy/shame of the prisoner and his family. The design seeks to make the building secure whilst at the same time looking like a fort in the landscape that would keep people from the site.

The Story of Atlantis

A Thirty minute drive from Cape Town towards the West Coast on the R27 will bring you to the town of Atlantis. Today it is home to an estimated 70,000 residents. Atlantis did not develop organically according to normal systems of economic growth and population movement, but resulted from massive government initiative and investment. Atlantis was designed to be a "bruinmense droomstad" (Coloured dream-city), (a modern industrial city that would propel the development of the Coloured people of South Africa. It was designed to provide modern homes and factory jobs for its residents as part of a major national development plan. In 1975 the Apartheid government dictated that thousands of Coloured people would be relocated to live in a new planned city away from Cape Town.

Virtually nothing existed on the site of the town before 1975, but by 2010 it was expected to be home for 500,000 people. It was designed as a industrial town that would create jobs and opportunity for many, but the plan for Atlantis has largely sunk with the old regime. Today the people of Atlantis are forging their own identity and vision for their future in this new democratic South Africa, without the benefit of economic investment or government support.





Atlantis is a town that came into being to accommodate "the other" based on the Apartheid government policy. To place a prison, a place created for "others" in Atlantis might seem like perpetuating the pattern of sending people other than us to the outskirts, yet I find it an appropriate site for the project I am proposing. Atlantis is infamous for gang activity and drug abuse. Not because it is bad people who live there, but because that is possibly the only way that the community can regain power over their own lives, as the government seems to have abandoned them. A prison that tries to turn this energy of taking back power, and using it for good, I think is well suited for this area. If anything the prison that I am proposing is aimed at correcting the mistakes and shortcomings of our society.

1. area	6. Avondale	7. Town Centre	8. Atlantis Industrial
1	Residential area	Commercial centre	Industrial area
2	Population :	Population :	Population :
3	(approx.) 22100	(approx.) 700	(approx.) 50
4	Average income per	Average income per	Average income per
5	household/year:	household/year:	household/year:
6	R 0.00 - R	R 0.00 - R	R 0.00 - R
7	66,105.00	66,105.00	66,105.00

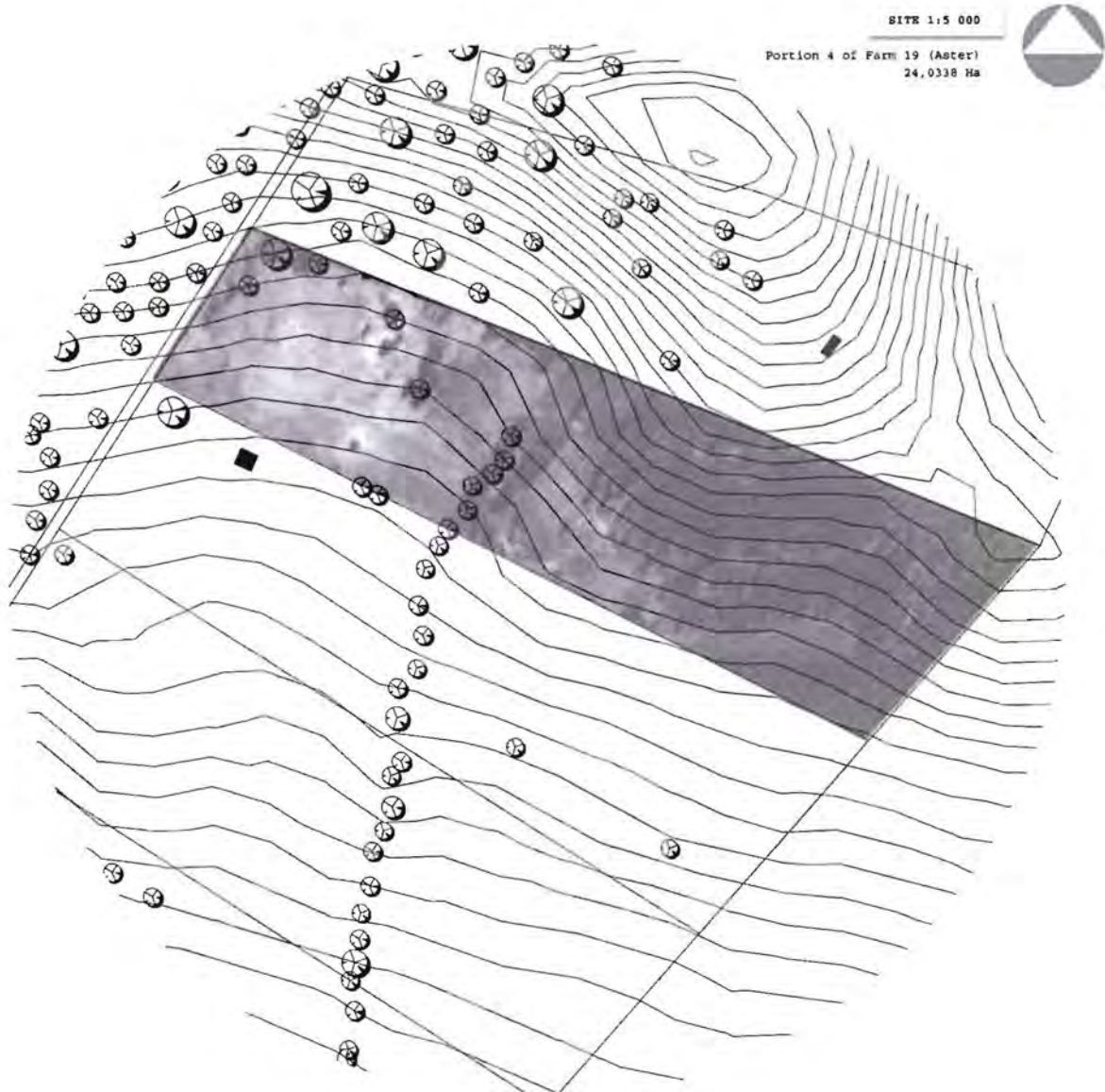


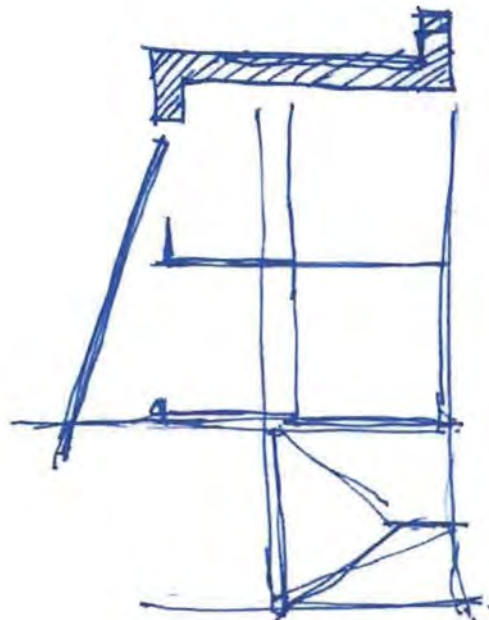
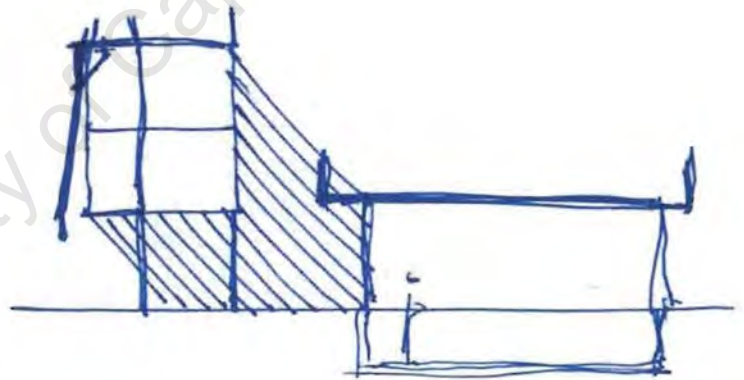
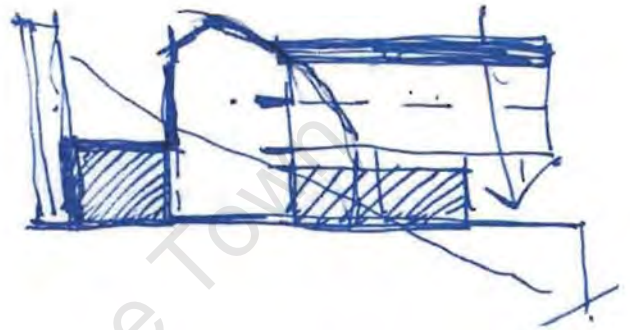
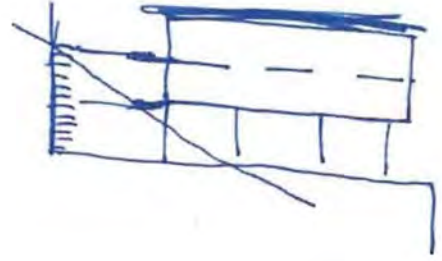


Site Photos:

(opposite top) View down the road from site, (bottom)neighbouring farm growing
 aloe. (this page top) Photo of the site, (bottom) neighbouring farm growing olive
 trees.

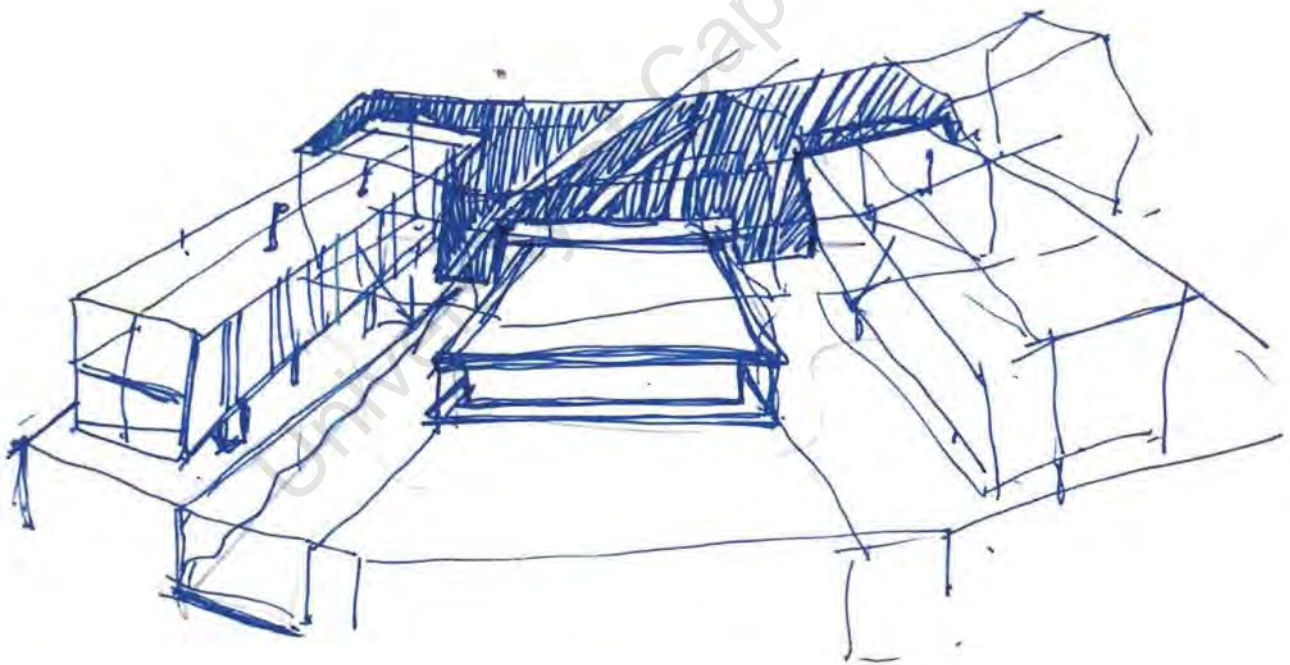
The site I chose is a 24,0338 Ha portion of farm 19 on the Klein Dassenberg road just outside Atlantis. This road meets main road that is set to become part of the BRT system linking Atlantis to Cape Town. This allows public transport for families of juvenile prisoners from Cape Town. The site is surrounded by low density farms lands.





Early concept sketches

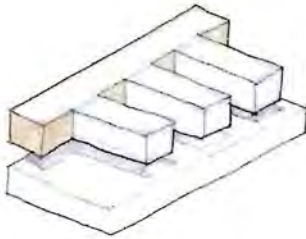
Looking at the four main typologies in prison design, radial, courtyard, telephone pole and campus layouts, I chose to combine the telephone pole plan but adapting it such that the cell blocks leading off from the main circulation space would only be toward one side. The main circulation space would then form a retaining space between the cell blocks and the sloping hill. This allows a secure boundary toward the back of the site. Terraces would be created and this provides the opportunity to develop another boundary system informed by ha-ha's.



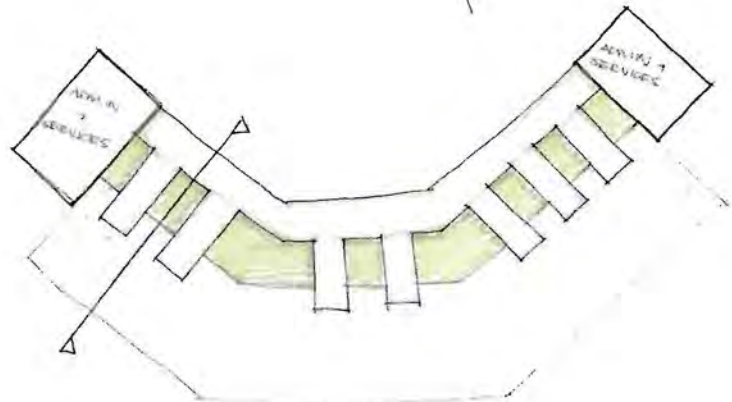
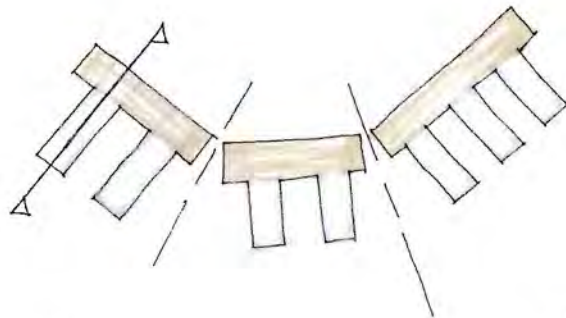


Variation in the Telephone-Pole Style

- only having cell blocks on the one side
- the circulation space follows the contours of the site.



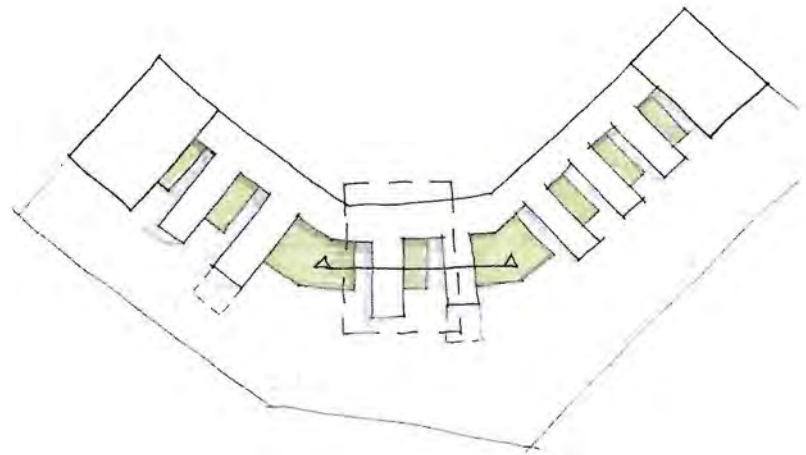
Inserting Education space on the ground floor/lower level



1.



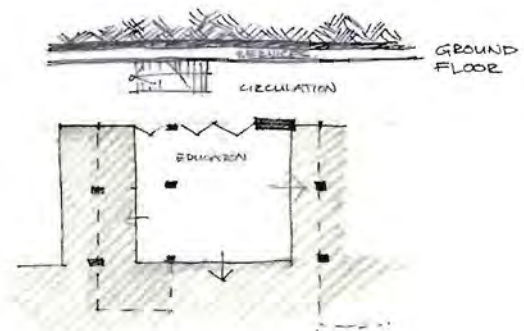
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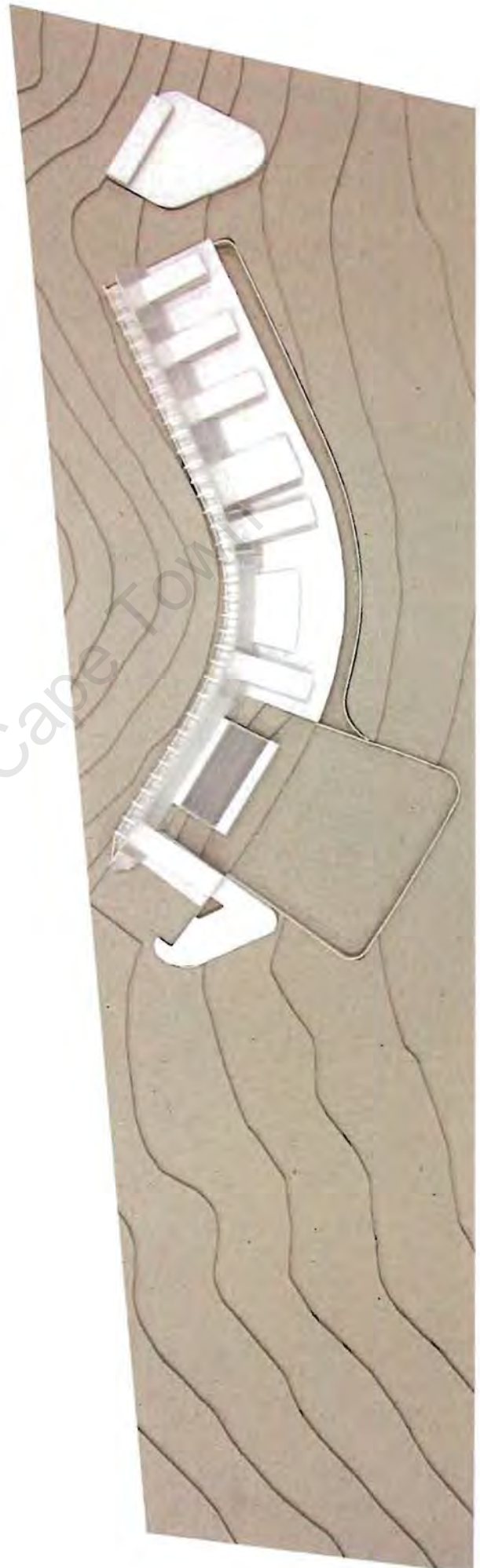
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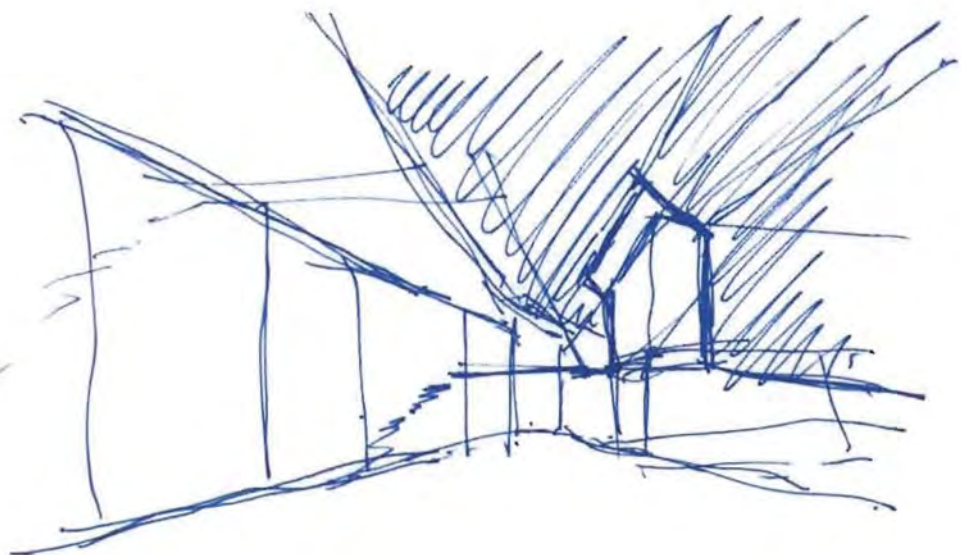
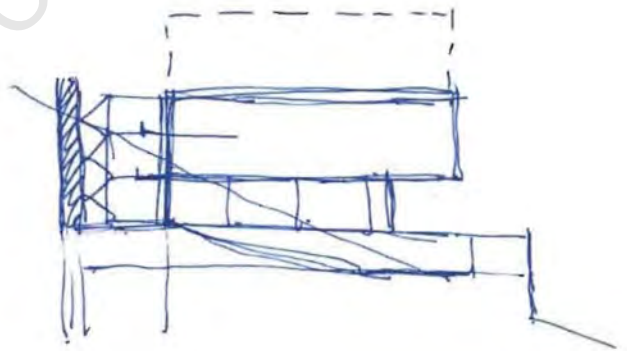
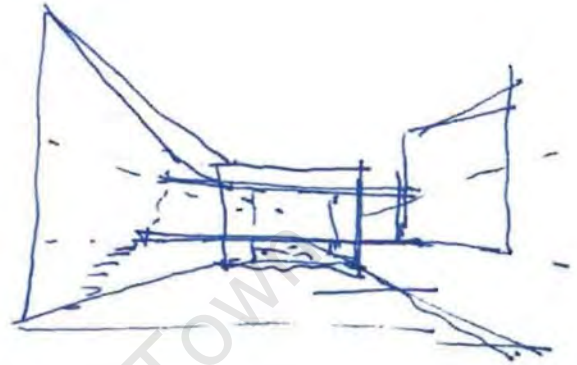
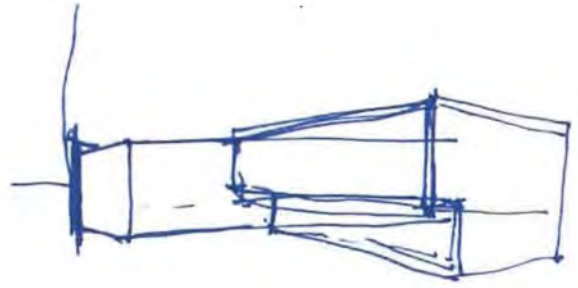


Courtyard and Relaxation Spaces inserted between Cell blocks.

Form of the building

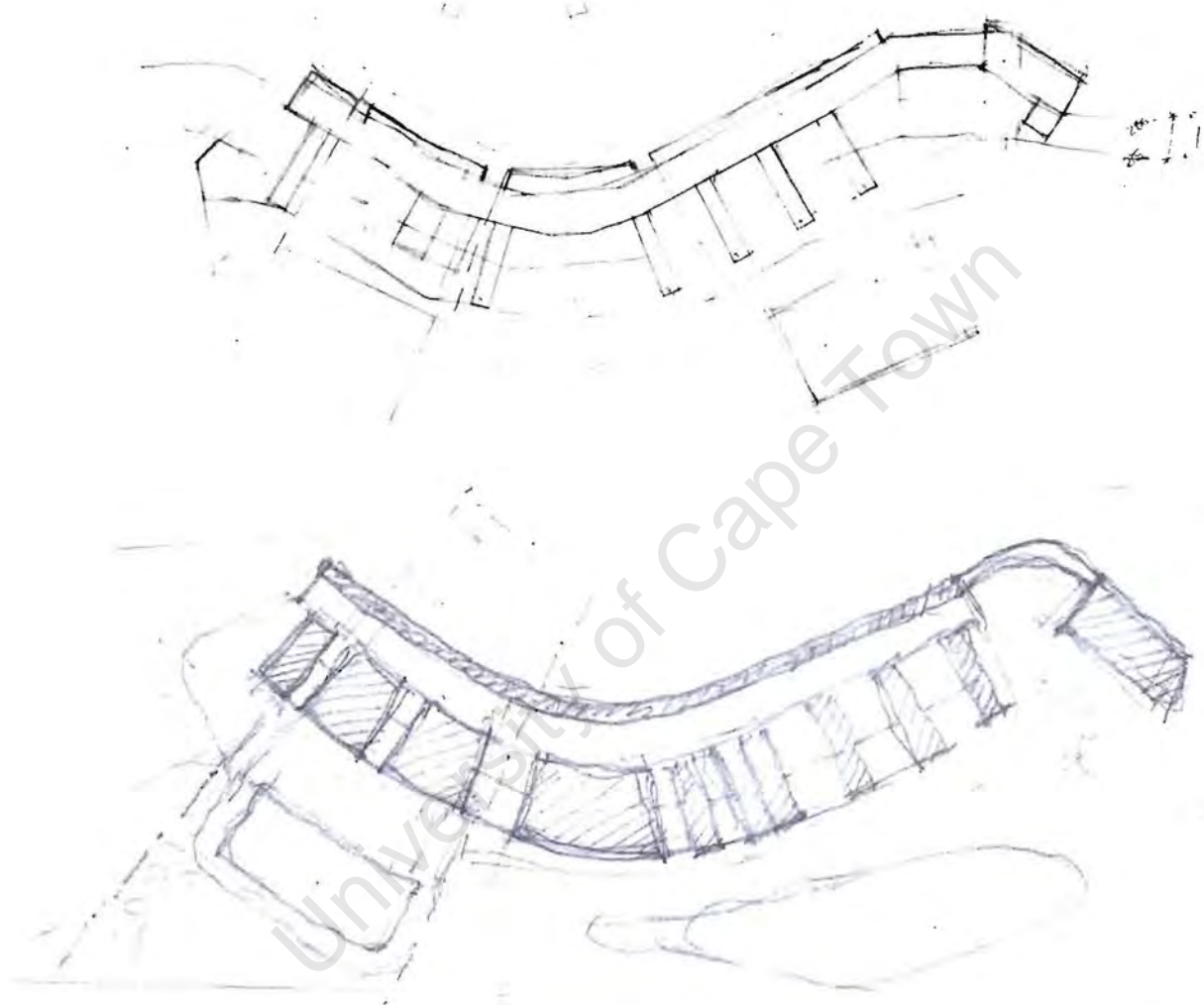
The building is designed to wrap around and follow the contours of the site. The building takes its shape from two common prison plan types namely the telephone pole and the radial system - the plans are merged and halved to create a main circulation space that functions as retaining system against the slope of the site. The accommodation space then pushes perpendicularly away from the circulation space exposing the view towards the ocean and Table Mountain. The inmates are never deprived of pleasant views. The slope of the site makes the user's access to views possible. As the site slopes down any form of bounding structure, be it fence, wall or a ha-ha.

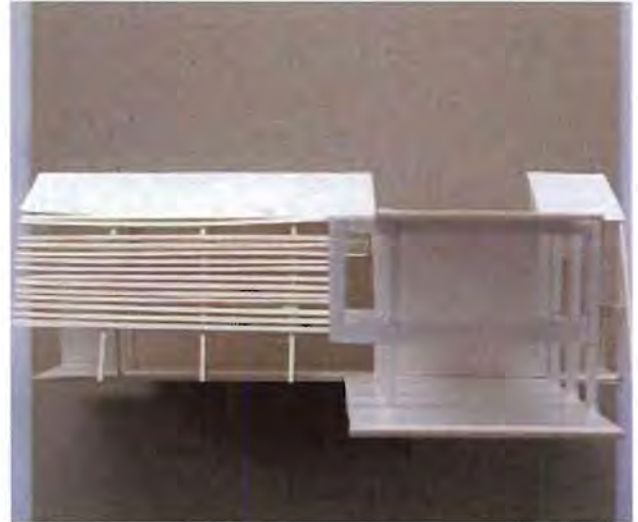
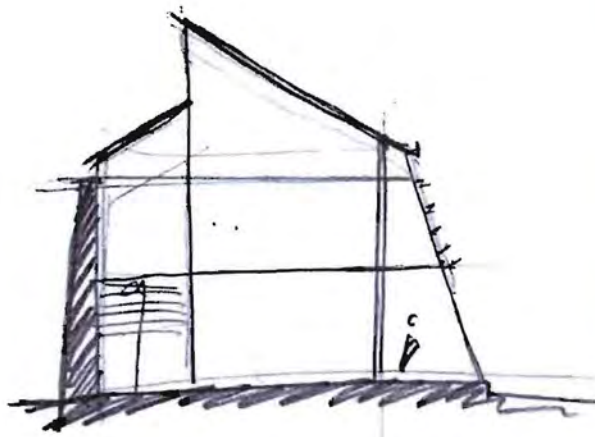




Spatial organisation

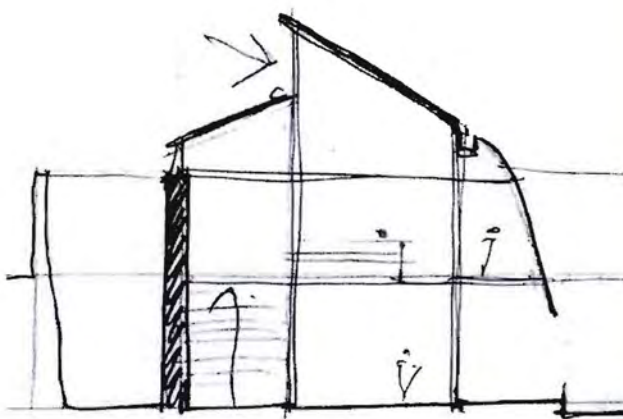
The spaces inside the detention centre are organised to mimic or relate as closely as possible to everyday life outside of prison. It would only make sense to have the prisoners move from living quarters to working/learning spaces and to recreational areas freely given the time of day.

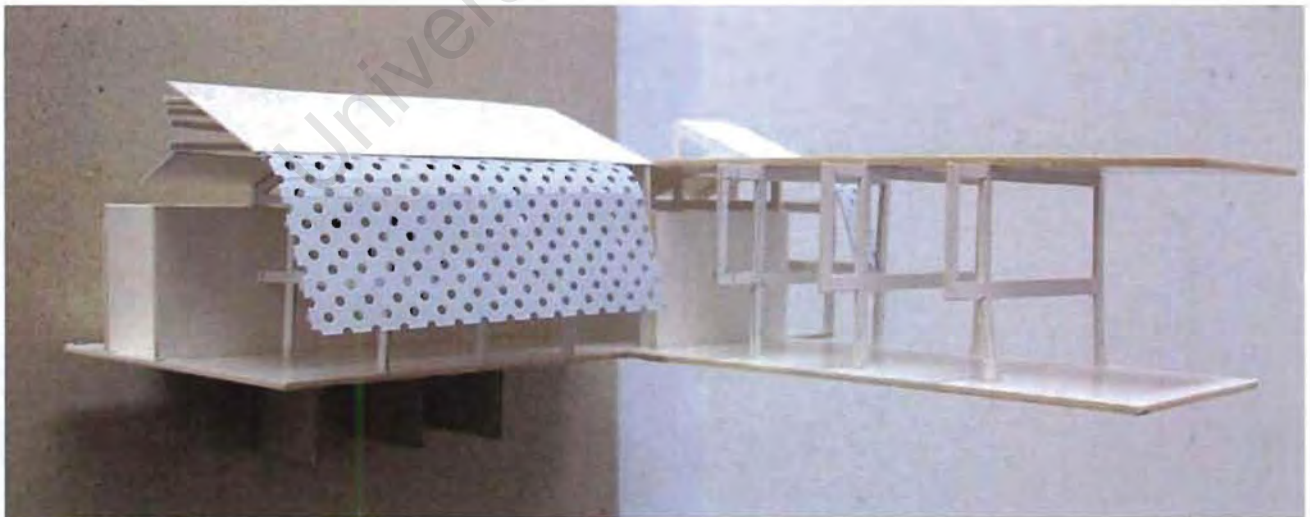
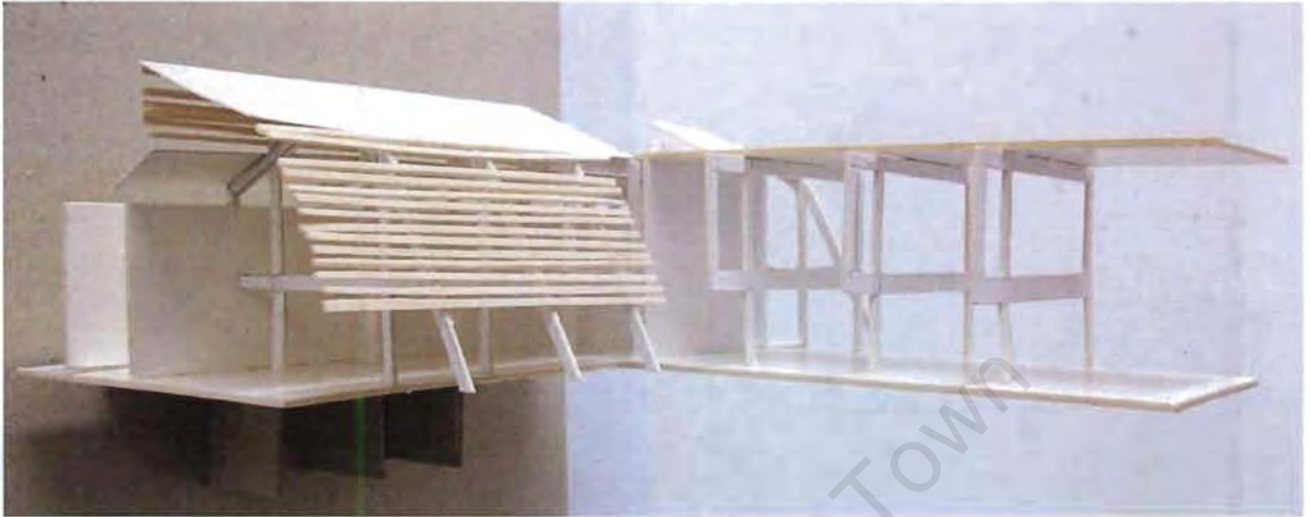


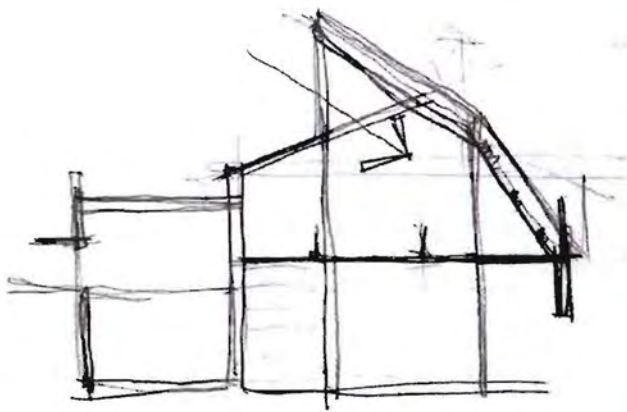


Exploring Skin :

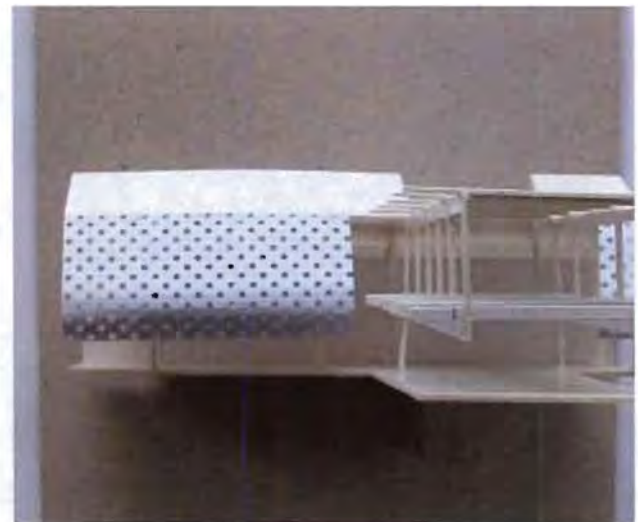
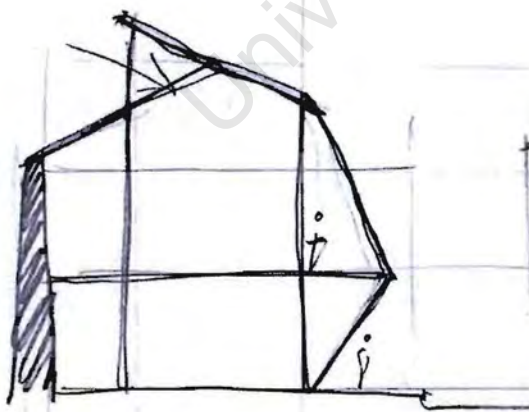
playing with the screening device of the main circulation space. To protect the prisoner's identity and pride. The screen is on the South side, but not meant to screen from the sun.



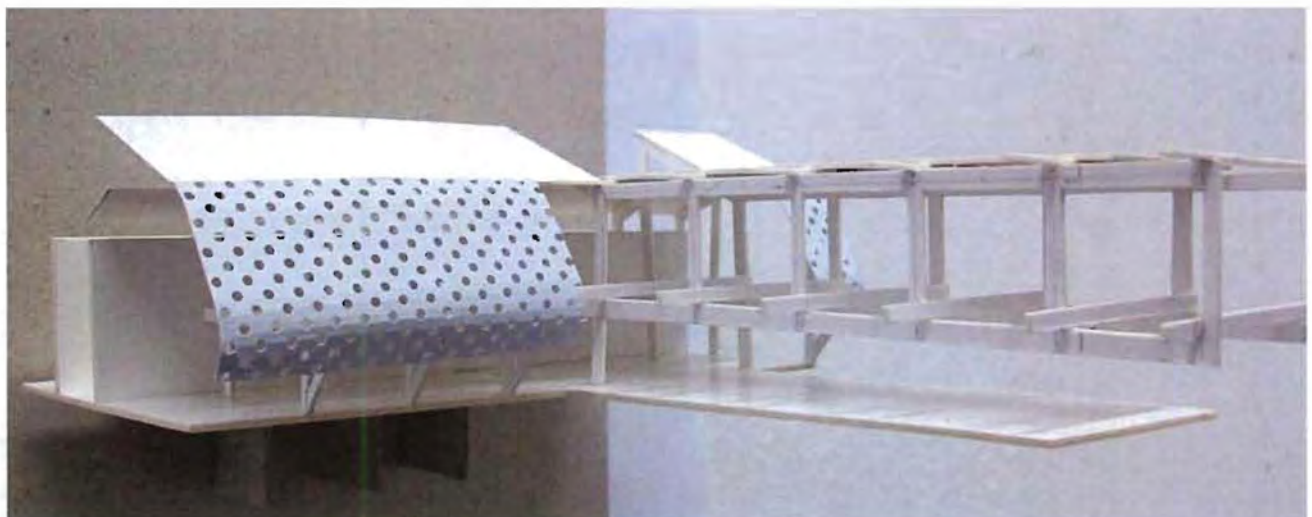
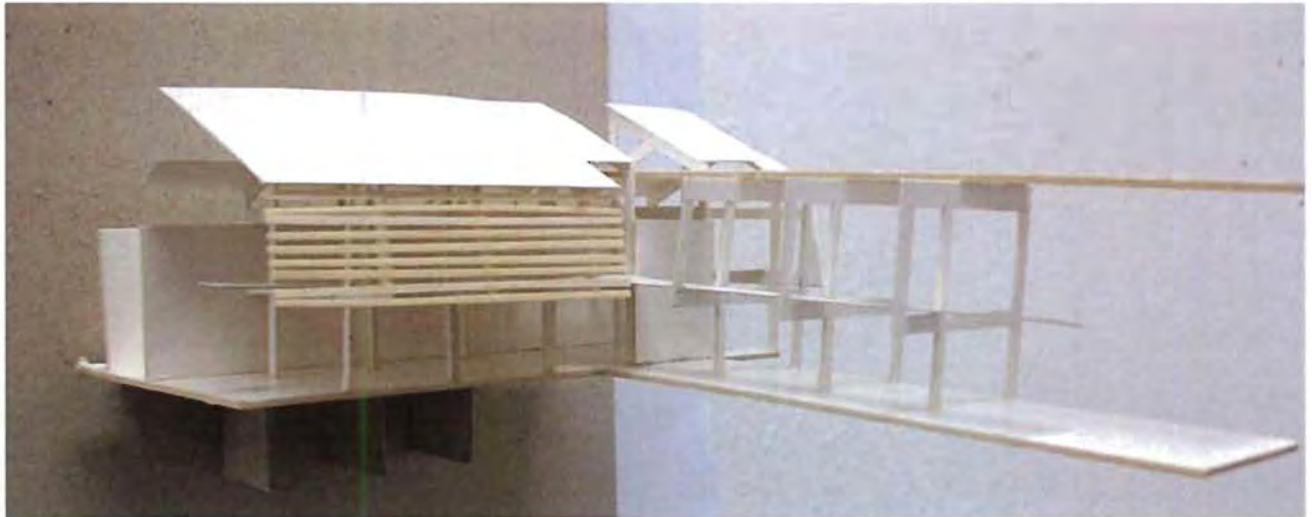


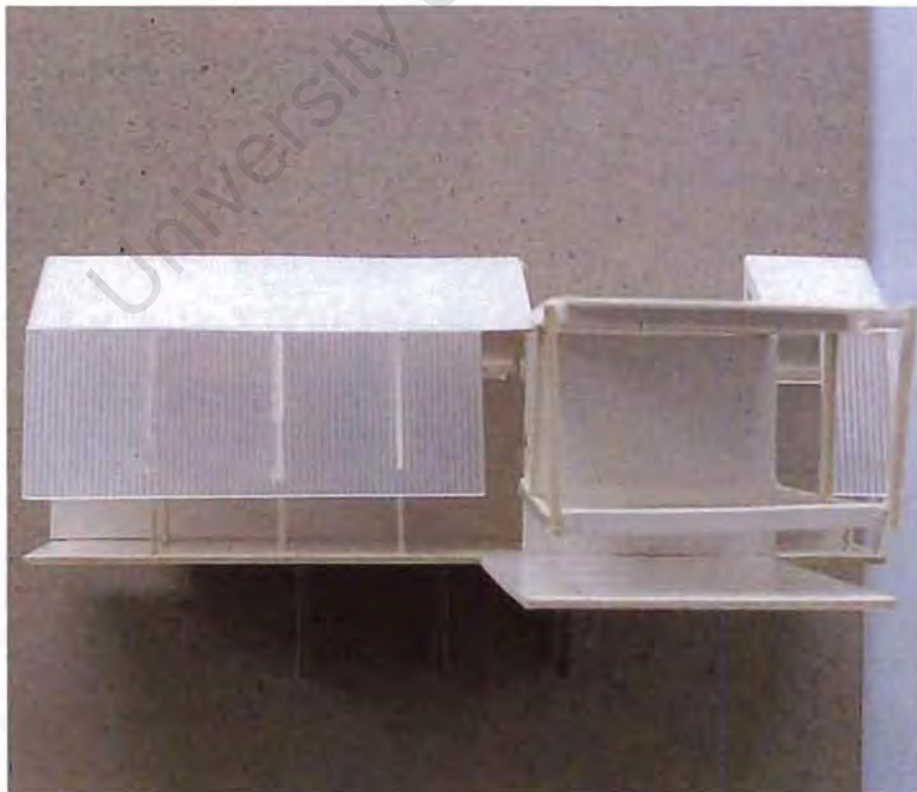
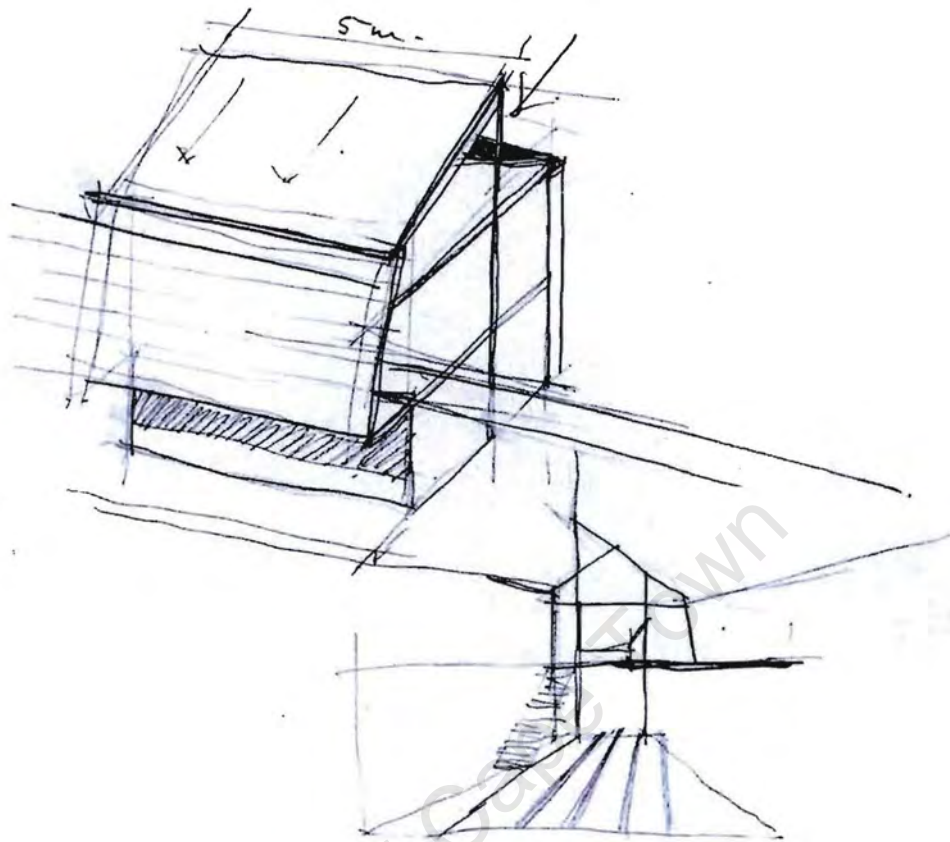


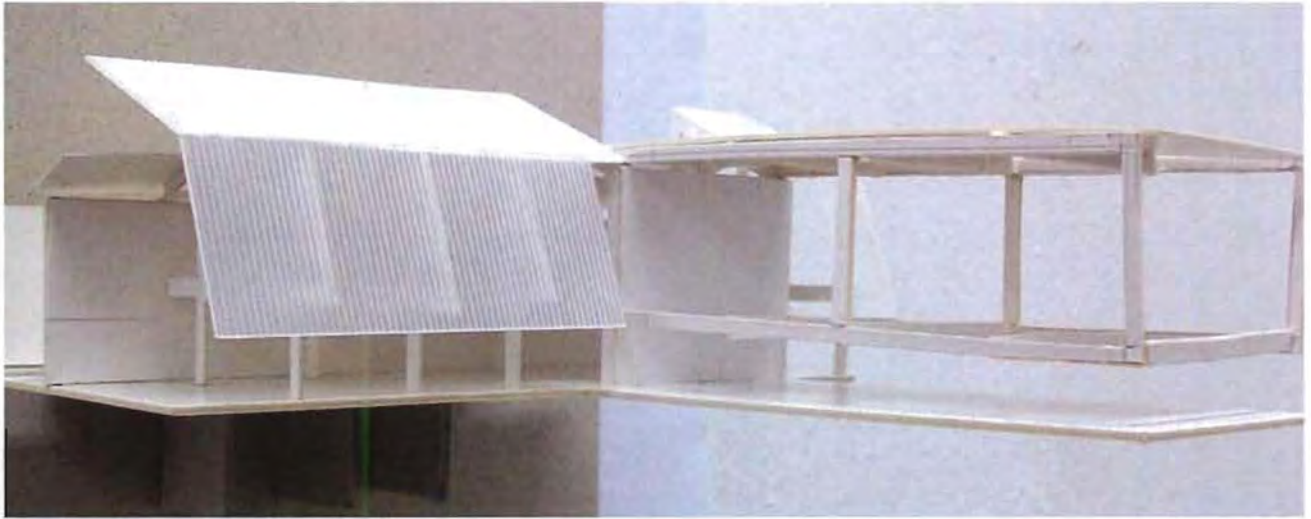
Exploring Skin :
Timber variation.



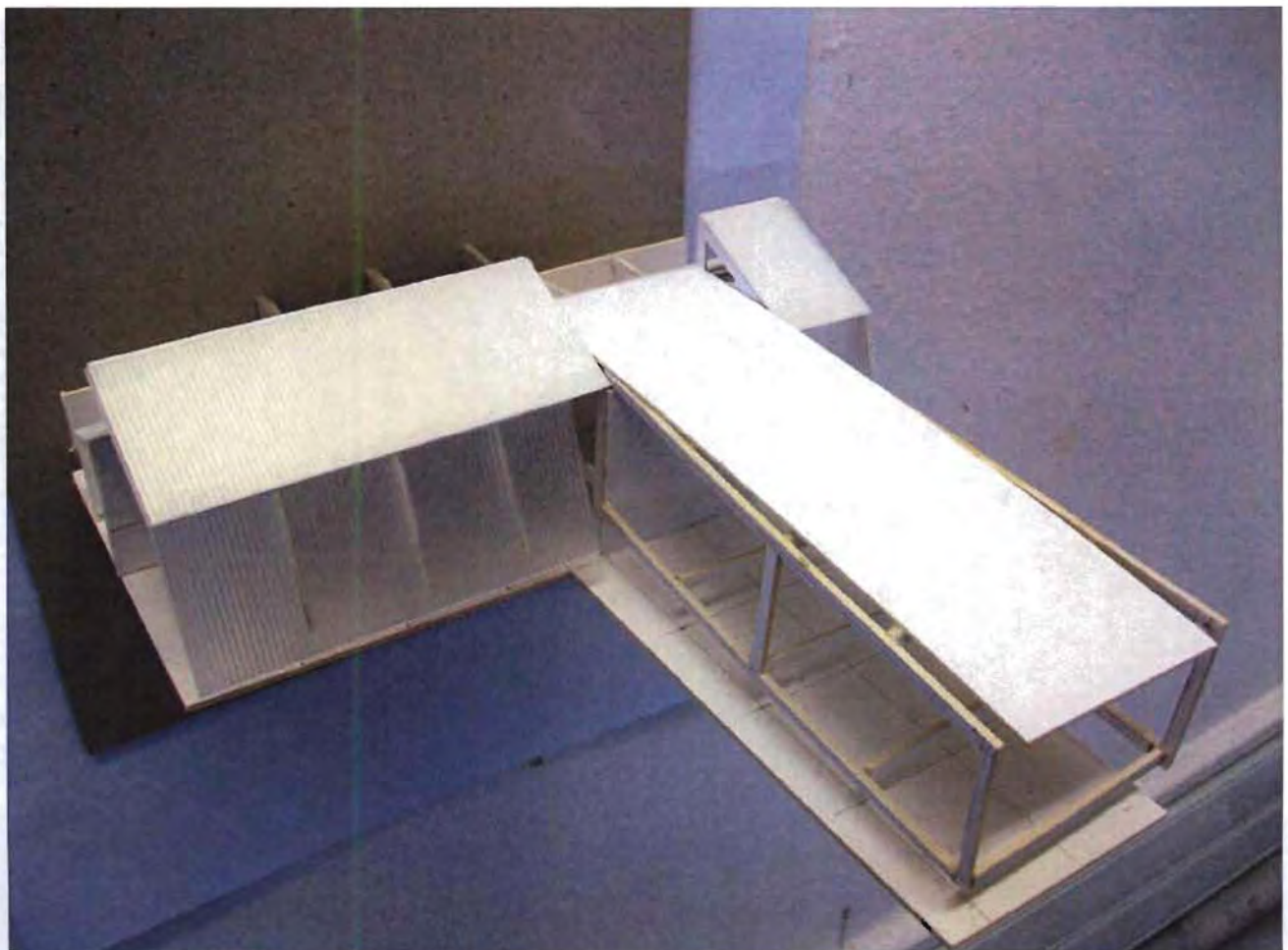
Exploring Skin :
Variation of the curved metal screen.



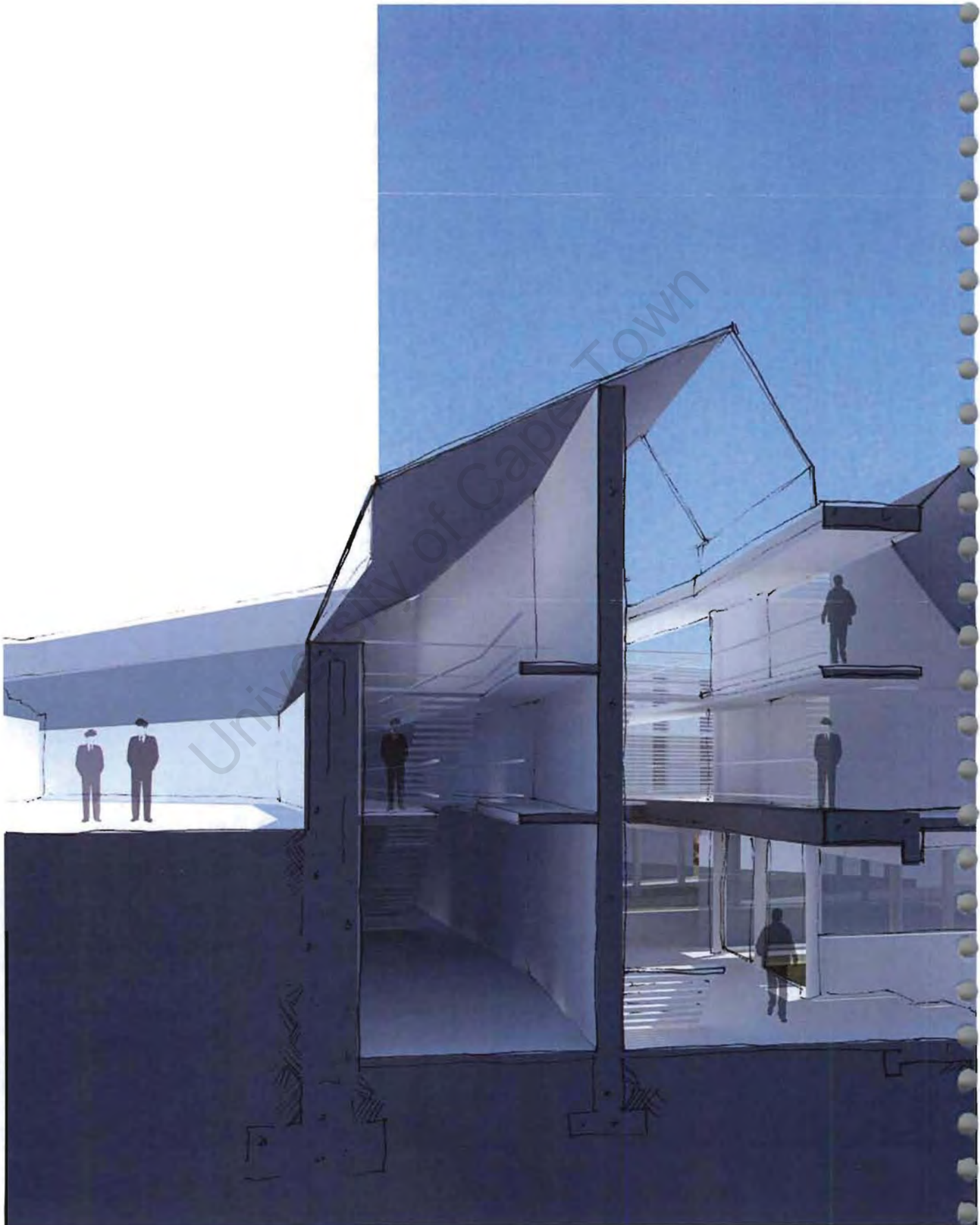




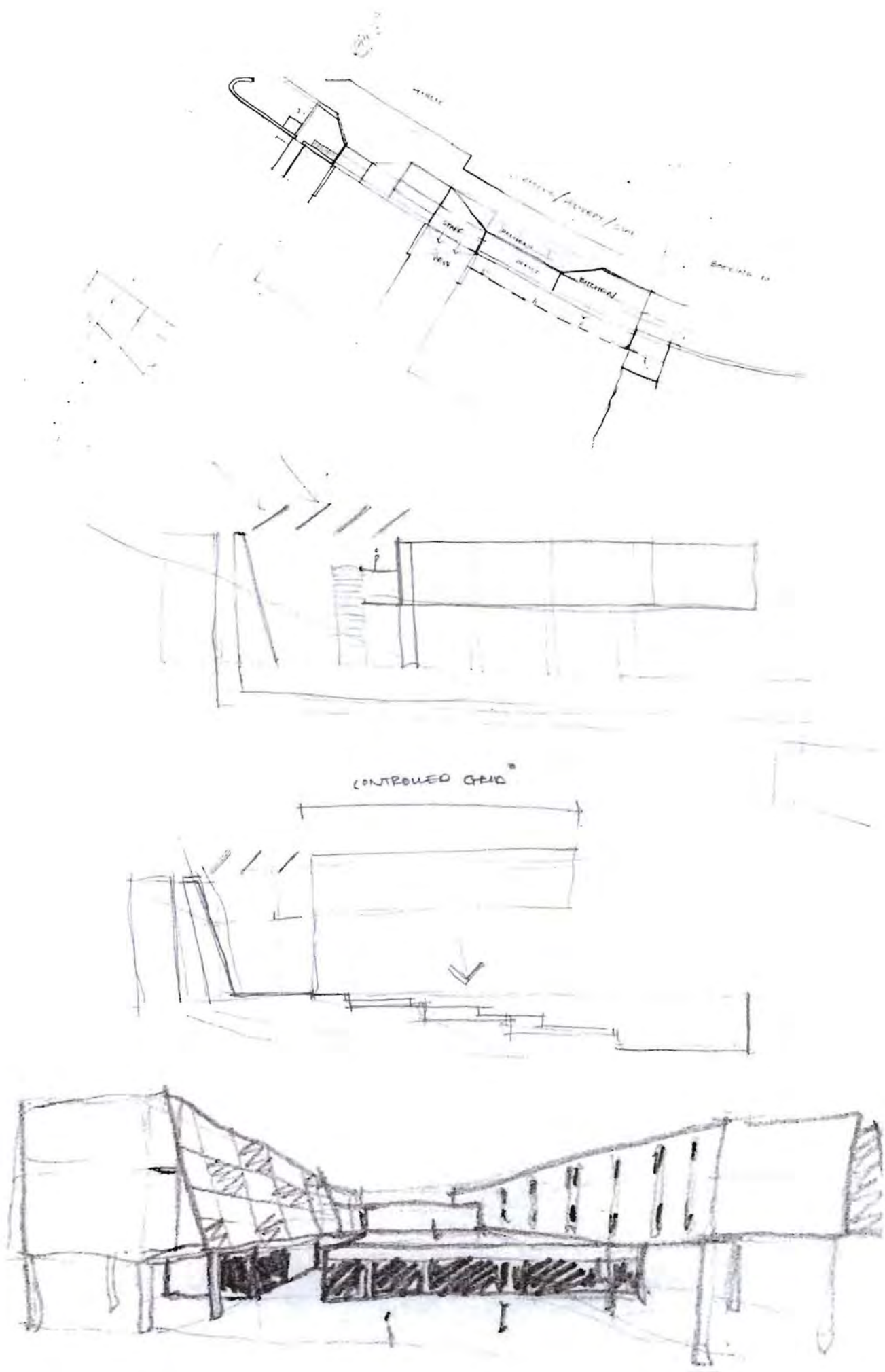
Most recent screen option :
Translucent plastic material.



Early concept section :







Conclusion:

Concept model revisited:

In retrospect, given that both plants have grown to the same size, regardless of light, i have come to the conclusion that living things will adapt and change as best possible in order to survive. Not to now liken criminals to plants, but i have learned through my assumptions in the behaviour in plants, that one cannot always predict the behaviour of living beings. It is essentially up to every user/inmate of a prison facility - no matter how high tech or accommodating to needs - to survive and flourish in that environment. What i as Architect can however do, is to design environments that allow the user the best possible space to inhabit every day.



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